

## **A tiny cog in the Olympic and Paralympic broadcasting giant wheel**

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Broadcasting the biggest sporting spectacle in the world is a colossal task, one that brings people the trials and tribulations of athletes to the homes of people all over the world. Live television is an integral part of a sporting event, and the resulting images that create a lasting legacy inspiring people over generations. Each Olympic Games have had their own moment that has gone on to define the event for years to come. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games produced sporting moments that will define its legacy for the city and the world of sports in equal measure.

After a year-long delay, worsening COVID-19 conditions and restrictions arising thereof, behind closed doors and budgets going overboard, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games concluded with a dazzling display of fireworks at the National Stadium in the Japanese capital on Sunday.

As the athletes return to their respective countries after putting in their best effort in Tokyo, my classmates (at the Tsukuba International Academy for Sport Studies-TIAS 2.0) and I returned to the University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba campus with an experience of a lifetime. For students like me, living and studying in Japan, the Broadcast Training Programme (BTP) of the Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) turned out to be a unique opportunity to contribute towards the successful delivery of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

### **A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity**

The opportunity to be part of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games came through this BTP initiative of the OBS, which in partnership with global HR major Pasona Inc., created a special programme to train local university students with hands-on experience, and employ them for the broadcast operations of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Olympic Broadcasting Services or OBS is the host broadcast organisation for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which is responsible for the production of the live coverage of the Games on television, radio and digital platforms around the world, which includes the competitions as well as the opening and closing ceremonies.

Broadcasting mega sporting events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games is a massive operation which requires a central hub called the International Broadcast Centre (IBC) in the host city which serves as the home for the OBS as well as the numerous rights-holding broadcasters, offering them physical spaces for studios, offices as well as production control rooms which is then transmitted around the world. In a world where movement was severely restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and as spectators were barred from watching Tokyo 2020 in the stadiums, the images produced from these Games were even more critical.

The opportunity to join the BTP programme, much like other university students around Japan, was introduced to us at the University of Tsukuba as well, which was too good to pass up on. Even though past batches were part of the workshops for the BTP as the Olympic and Paralympic Games were originally scheduled for 2020, the current batch of students (TIAS 2.0) was encouraged to apply for it as well.

TIAS, was established in 2014 as part of the event legacy for Tokyo 2020, to foster the next generation of sports professionals at the University of Tsukuba, a short distance away from Tokyo. Legacy is an important aspect in the organisation of the Olympic Games; as such initiatives are intended for the long-term benefit of the host city as well as the society that inhabits it.

The Master's Program in Sport and Olympic Studies established within the TIAS program was one such academic legacy initiative, and students from the world over have benefited from the program by specialising in different aspects of sports, including Olympic and Paralympic Education, Sport Science and Medicine, Sport Management, Sport for Development and Peace as well as Teaching, Coaching and Japanese Culture.

### Applying to the BTP programme

Applying for the BTP programme online was a routine task of filling out individual details on online forms and submitting to the organisation, which then called back students they found suited to the various roles. The interview process was organised by HR professionals from BTP and OBS, who had the unique and daunting task of hiring and placing thousands of students in different roles across the various Olympic and Paralympic venues based on individual preferences and interview responses.

### Venues and role(s)

Having had a background in journalism and media operations before, I was looking forward to this opportunity and was assigned to the Games Services team at the Yokohama Stadium, venue for the softball and baseball competitions during the Olympic Games. My experience at the Games was divided into two different roles, as I initially assisted the Broadcast Logistics Manager of the venue in looking after the broadcast areas within the stadium, and joined up with the liaison team to assist the rights-holding broadcasters (RHBs) covering the event, as well as the ENG crews (electronic news gathering) in different areas of the stadium.

Broadcasting operations consist of several departments within the vertical, which involve backend work such as the setting up of the broadcasting compound and areas within the department: various work rooms, catering areas, technical operations offices, commentary rooms and positions, etc. Front-end services include servicing the external media areas or field of play positions where multiple cameras are set up to capture the sporting action, media stands and other areas.



**Baseball** – A typical mixed zone with Japan's baseball players doing interviews after winning the Olympic gold medal in the men's baseball competition at the Yokohama Stadium.



**Yokohama Stadium** - Settling into the Yokohama Stadium as a member of the Games Services department in the Olympic Broadcasting Services.

The smooth running and delivery of the softball and baseball competitions allowed some of the crew to be called back for the Paralympic Games, which were held two weeks after the

conclusion of the Olympics. The two-week gap between the events is usually to tweak the venues to make them ready for the Para-sports the venues are designated to host, as they need to be made accessible as well as suited to athletes with different forms of disabilities.

The Makuhari Messe exhibition hall in the city of Chiba was a cluster of three different venues assigned for goalball, sitting volleyball, wheelchair fencing and para-taekwondo, and I was assigned to assist the liaison manager at the three latter sports. The reduced number of workforce for the Paralympics meant being assigned more responsibility in the liaison department, which looked after the interviews conducted by broadcasters upon the completion of matches in these venues.



**Sitting Volleyball mixed zone** – Players from the Germany and Brazil men's sitting volleyball teams doing interviews with broadcasters after the end of their preliminary match at the Makuhari Messe exhibition hall during the Paralympic Games.

**Wheelchair Fencing** – Broadcasters interview athletes from the men's wheelchair fencing competition in the mixed zone during the Paralympic Games at the Makuhari Messe exhibition hall.



### In hindsight

While the hours were long and delivering the Games during a pandemic posing its own set of challenges, the moving images that were produced from each of these venues as an end product was the result of the excellent teams working tirelessly behind the scenes, ensuring that the competitions went on without any disruptions or hindrances. And as the fireworks disappeared into the night sky during the glittering closing ceremony, members from the different teams working across the venues went back to their respective countries, cities and colleges with new friendships and memories that will last a lifetime.